Dhaka, Thursday, February 4, 1993

A Battle Royal in Malaysia

A "Battle Royal" in Malaysia is reaching its climax later this month when constitutional amendments, approved by the country's parliament on 18-20 January, limiting the immunity from prosecution for the federation's nine Sultans, become law, with or without the assent of the King. Interpretations vary on the fate of the amendments in case the King, one of the Sultans elected on a five-year term, refuses the consent. Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad who is leading the crusade, from closed door conference halls to the floor of the parliament, to reduce the prerogatives, insists that after some changes made in the constitution in 1985, the amendment would automatically become law 30 days after it was passed by the parliament. This is what makes 18-20 February so crucial in Malaysia's contemporary history.

The new generation of Malaysian politicians. especially of the dominant Malay race, have always argued against the Sultans and their sons enjoying far too much privileges; the immunity from prosecution on wide-range crimes and extravagant life styles. The whole concept of the rulers providing a continuity in the system, with the Sultans serving as symbols of Malay supremacy in a multi-racial and multi-religious country, has been steadily losing its validity.

In the present case, the move to limit royal privileges was sparked off in late November by the alleged assault of a school hockey coach by the Sultan of Johor, the state bordering Singapore. The existing immunity protects the ruler from facing the court, while a cross section of Malaysians of all races no longer approve of the outdated shield that places the Sultan of Johor and other rulers above the law.

At the head of the campaign to limit the privileges, especially the immunity from prosecution, for the Sultans is none other than the Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir whose middle class background, political education and profession - he is a medical doctor - make him something of an adversary of much that goes on in and around the constitutional monarchy and the palaces of the Sultans. A modern forward-looking and a somewhat aggressive personality is out to cut the Sultans to their sizes, minus much of their illused fringe benefits. At this moment, he seems to have no intention of turning against the system as such. Any move to abolish the monarchy would certainly be resisted by the Malays, especially in rural areas. However, if the rulers refuse to adjust to the changing times or decline to accept the constitutional amendments in good grace, there is a clear danger of a deadlock being reached between the two sides. Prime Minister supported by a sizable majority of people and the Sultans who seem to enjoy the backing from a breakaway section of the ruling party.

Although Malay politicians generally react to a difficult situation with caution, usually looking for a compromise, close associates of the Prime Minister have started talking about resolving the deadlock by rewriting the entire constitution, a drastic move that could well mean suspending the present constitution and declaring a state of emergency. In a country where politics has so far been dominated by national consensus, this will mean a major shift in the ethos of the nation. One sincerely hopes that no matter how the present deadlock is resolved, the federation's stability and its continuing economic progress will remain un-

To Poetry then

allected.

February, from its very first day, brings in a change in the air. Of Dhaka, to be sure, and the other cities as well. Possibly of all our urban settlements and perhaps of all of Bangladesh. A premature but spiritually very real spring descends on and overtakes a poor material reality thanks to the Great Language Movement and its undying remembrance.

Although it looks very much so, nevertheless it is not only unfair but also half-true to say that whatever change the advent of February brings is all rituals and nothing beside. Even the most powerfully dynamic things tend to be canonized into a stillness of statuary. Although ritualism is far from the end of an institution or a movement, some of the latter phenomena do tend to rejuvenate themselves from within, displaying a kind of self-correcting mechanism used to be called 'revolution within the revolution'. For the seventh year running the National Poetry Festival has been doing exactly that to the big month-long happening we call 'Ekushey'. If the Festival has already been showing signs of ageing and stultifying itself into inanimity, how can one detract its glorious role in frontally taking on military dictatorship and heaping a most ignominious defeat on that? And neither can one diminish in any way the potential the National Poetry Festival has in engaging the smallness of mind harking back to medievally mean sectarianism. In fact that was the keynote struck by different speakers on the occasion of the inauguration of the Festival on Monday.

The Festival, ennobled by the hero's death of Patua Qamrul Hassan on it dias, has, for some time indeed, been forced to go more for sloganeering than for genuine poetry, for a set of very understandable reasons. This year's motto Victory to Bangla, Victory to Kabita' however promises a change of the outlook. This motto, as a first and very significant merit, is singularly positive.

The Poetry Festival has done much. Perhaps it has still much more to do. And that mighty 'more' will take one mighty thing to achieve. Real good poetry - not cliches and, God save us, no more slogans. Tagore said of his songs — in one of his numbers — pran porano gaaner agun jaala — making the fire that's a song by burning the fuel of one's inner life. Was it Emily Dickinson who said. 'It takes life to love life'? O, poets, our dear, mad and prophetic ones, now on to the real stuff then as hinted by Rabindranath and Emily. No more the depraving slogans, but lines having souls that contaminate every woman and man with humanity - with love and daring.

Compulsory Primary Education

ANGLADESH Govern

A Two-tier Integrated System can Achieve the Goal

by Mahmood Aminul Islam

With the coming 'Ekushey' in mind, the author has suggested a two-tier integrated and

cost effective system of primary education to achieve the goal of Compulsory Primary

Education (CPE). Children will attend classes I and II in community supported feeder

schools, and complete the next three years of education — III, IV, and V — at primary

ment has announced introduction of Compulsory Primary Education (CPE) all over the country from the current academic session i.e. beginning January 1993. Earlier in the 80s, a policy to universalise primary education (UPE) was adopted, and more than 40 per cent of development budget in the education sector was allocated to implement two UPE projects till 1990: It resulted in creating public awareness about the importance of education for children and some improvement in primary infrastructure. But the programme limped along, and the expected breakthrough in universalising primary education did not come about. Making allowance for the inflated enrollment figures and other inaccuracies in reporting, it is believed that currently 65 to 70 per cent of 6-10 years old children (around 11 million) get enrolled in schools. Of them, over 60 per cent drop out before completing 5-year cycle of primary education. For

1986. (source: BANBEIS). The government, however, claim satisfactory performance of primary education which has led them to take the above bold and even audacious decision. They might be referring to the CPE programme im plemented last year in 68 thanas - one in each of 64 districts in the country plus lour other thanas.

example, of 4.09 million chil-

dren enrolled in class I in

1986, 1.51 million (36.91%)

survived upto class V in 1990.

Of them, 0.84 million, or over

55% got admitted in class VI

of secondary schools in 1991.

This is 20.62% of the cohort of

Official statistics apart, we may discuss the state of preparedness of the government to expand the CPE programme throughout the country during the span of one year only.

Response from Community In a programme like CPE,

enthusiastic response from the community to send primary age children to school and take active interest in their education till completion of studies is of vital importance. This enthusiasm is taken to be largely missing now. There are

schools.

to-day 37,655 government primary schools. Each has a school managing committee to assist in the management of the school. Formed with representatives of parents and the community the committee, as a rule, remains inactive. The primary teachers who come from the local community could have fostered strong school-community relations through their personal example of dedication to work and professional competence. But by and large, they do not have the right attitude and motivation. It is essential, therefore, to win back the trust and confidence of both the community and the teachers for successful implementation of CPE programme. Measures which will, on the one hand, invest the school management committee with powers to effectively deal with the affairs of the school and, on the other hand, associate teachers in the decision making process at appropriate levels of planning and implementation, and make them accountable to the community may have to be devised.

The second important concern of CPE would be to make provision of enough classroom space to cope with the expected surge in enrollment. Primary schools are mostly 3roomed structure necessitating holding of classes in two

hours for classes I and II, and the second shift of 2 1/2 hours for classes III, IV and V. Even then, many schools cannot ac commodate all enrolled students. The problem has not appeared to be so acute due to poor daily attendance, averaging 50-60 per cent in most of the schools. Suggestions have been made to build new schools. But before that is done the existing schools should be expanded and improved keeping in view the growth in enrollment in the immediate future. However, it will be necessary to construct school buildings, in unschooled areas. Urging parents to send their children to school has to be matched with adequate provision of classroom space and other physical facilities.

shifts - the first shift of 2

In planning space require ment for CPE, handicapped children cannot be left out. But there appears to be no clear cut government policy on their schooling. With some training and specially designed teach ing aids primary teachers should be able to handle hand icapped children in classroom situation excepting the severely handicapped ones.

Quality of Education

The third concern will be the quality of education which tends to be overlooked in quest of enrollment. The curriculum and the quality of teaching affect the learning outcome. But there are other factors which tell upon the quality. Textbooks are now supplied free every year at a huge cost, while the students,

mostly poor, find it hard to buy writing materials to keep up with class work. It is, however, possible to economise on text books through re-use (as sug gested by experts), and utilise the savings for supply of writing materials. Secondly, preschooling is not recognised in primary system. But 6-year-old children most of whom come from poor, illiterate families with poor vocabulary and other handicaps badly need some preparation before they begin formal schooling. This can be done at little extra cost by integrating preparatory learning in the school curriculum of classes I and II, treated as an undivided unit of instruction.

The period of two years can be divided into three stages of learning instead of the present two. This has been done in non-formal mode of teaching.

Lastly, there should be enough teachers in a school. A teacher student ratio of more than 1:40 does not lead to effective teaching and students performance sharply drops.

Financing of Programme

The most serious concern of CPE will be financing of the programme. In 1990-91 an amount of Tk 5052 million was spent on primary schools (about 94 per cent of primary education budget) as recurrent expenditure mainly to pay for teachers salary. And an amoun of about Tk 1049 million was spent on construction/ren ovation of school buildings. supply of furniture and textbooks, and training o teachers and administrators. The present level of expendi-

ture has been kept low because of resource constraints, and does not give a realistic estimale fexcepting for textbooks provided free to each student) of per pupil requirements of additional space and teachers and other school facilities which have to be provided for effective teaching-learning.

Only, employment of additional teachers and construction of extra classrooms will greatly push up expenditure on primary education. Efforts have to be made to make primary education cost effective and internally efficient. In this respect the BRAC programme of non-formal primary education deserves serious attention.

The BRAC model, based on

the concept of small community based feeder schools, is a 3-year programme for children. A group of 30 children who sit on mats in a room of a thatched house in the village taken on rental of about Tk 100/- a month) constitutes the class. A teacher, usually a woman, with 9-10 years of schooling and locally recruited on a salary of Tk 500/- takes the class after an initial training of 10-15 days. The school situated within the safety of the neighbourhood and within casy walking distance of children, runs for 2 1/2 hours a day six days a week without long vacation. There is no formal examination but childrens performance is evaluated through weekly and monthly tests. Due to small size of the class the teacher can pay individual attention to all the students. Nominal rent paid for hiring accommodation for the classroom and small teacher salary have slashed down the two major items of expenditure on school buildings and teachers incurred in a primary education programme. On completion of studies, students generally enrol in local primary schools in class IV/V. The programme, founded on strong school-community rela-

tions in closely supervised. The monthly co-ordination meeting between the teachers and the supervisor is utilised for recurrent training. Incidence of drop-out is al most nil. Learning competencies attained by the students are comparable as, reportedly, they do well on joining primary schools.

THE SUGGESTION TWO-TIER PRIMARY EDU

CATION SYSTEM: The BRAC model described above has attracted worldwide attention and persuaded the government to start a non-formal primary education programme through NGOs. A number of satellite schools in unschooled pockets within catchment area of primary schools have also been opened in community provided structures and with financial and administrative support of the government.

These schools are meant for 6/7 years old children (class and II) and run by locally resident female teachers with secondary school certificate (10 years of schooling) on a monthly pay of Tk 500/-. The schools have proved to be great success in terms of enrollment and community involvement. Headteacher of the local primary school assists in the selection of teachers and academic supervision. Opening of more satellite schools is now planned.

The satellite school idea can be adapted as a two-tier system of primary education. The first tier will be a two-year programme of instruction (covering preparatory and class I and II) to be imparted by community supported Service Special Correspondent | feeder schools. There will be

their teaching in one or two shifts as required. This will relieve the pressure on immediate construction of new classrooms and employment of regular trained primary teachers Ion a salary of Tk 2000/- as against Tk 500/- paid to feeder school teachers). Some existing primary schools may have to be relocated on the ba sis of concentration of school age population and other factors. There are roughly 100 primary schools in a thana, or about 8 per union. With 3 feeder schools attached to a primary school there will be about 24 feeder schools in a union and 300 in a thana. A union council (UC) committee with the UC chairman, word members, headteachers of primary schools and concerned (TEO) can be formed to decide on location of feeder schools, appointment of teachers, academic supervision (by head teachers) and for co-ordination. A thana committee with TNO, TEO, UC chairmen, representatives of headteachers (one from each union) and other may be formed to over-

sufficient number of such

schools to serve the needs of

smaller children residing in

different localities within the

catchment area of a primary

school. The primary school

will admit students in classes

III, IV and V, and arrange for

The proposed system will function within the framework of local level planning and implementation. Each UC committee and each primary school will prepare their demand of essential requirements according to planned enrollment in feeder schools and mother school following given policy guidelines. These will be consolidated by the thana committee and sent above for allocation of re-

officers have to be familiar with the techniques of enrollment planning and preparation of cost estimate for the required items. This will have the additional advantage of directly involving the community and the school in programme planning and implementation. An understanding has to be reached with the centre that funding requirements consolidated at the thana level cannot be changed without prior con-

sultation.

Bangladesh Government is

Mahmood Aminul Islam is a Ministry of Education

The New Commonwealth Era

EFORMATION in South Africa, the 1991 Harare Declaration on "fair and just government" and the demise of communism in Europe have generated a new era of endeavour and cooperation between the 50 member countries of the

Commonwealth. This fraternity of nations, a positive legacy of Britain's imperial past, is a chameleon with a rare instinct for survival, always reflecting and adapting to world events. Its activities have grown to embrace fields of cooperation unequalled in the world and never envisaged at its found

Today, the Commonwealth's major concerns still include democracy and basic human rights but also embrace debt relief for the poorest members of the club, equality for women, universal access to education, conservation — it is pioneering a challenging experiment on the sustainable management of tropical forests - the fight against AIDS and combating drug abuse and traf-

The Commonwealth is administered by a secretariat based in London — and a multilayered network of more than 25 organisations, bringing together nurses, magistrates, trade unionists, journalists, ar chitects, surveyors, parliamen tarians, educationalists and professionals of every kind. All are engaged in improving the welfare of the 1.3 billion Commonwealth citizens, representing a third of the world's population.

Unity and Diversity

The membership of the Commonwealth - a free association of sovereign independent states, including dependent territories - is spread across the world, containing a variety of religions, and diver-

sity, the members have many things in common, and in their aspirations they enjoy a remarkable degree of unity and coordination.

Democratic Values

Membership depends on shared traditional and democratic values and the primary use of English — the lingua franca of this international



The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku.

brotherhood of nations. The strength of the voluntary assembly is not only democracy but the similar systems and institutions each has inherited from the colonial past in government, law, education and trade. Political dialogue is one of the Commonwealth's greatest strengths and one to which all members are committed.

South Africa's policy of institutionalised racial discrimination was always a major preoccupation of the biannual Commonwealth Heads of Government Conferences (CHGC). With the dismantling of apartheid in prospect, agreement has been reached to wind down sanctions and see what can be done to help South Africa - a former mem-

by Jim Kelsey from belonging to the club, and the rich countries help ber of the Commonwealth - to

Fundamental Principle Britain's Prime Minister,

move towards democracy.

John Major, introduced the "fair and just government" requirement for members that was endorsed at the Harare CHGC in 1991. A fundamental principle of the family, it has in a few cases, been ignored, but in the new rejuvenated Commonwealth, members are putting things right. The Commonwealth Secretariat has already sent constitutional experts and observers to member countries preparing to return to democratic rule. Ten missions have been undertaken so far, the latest to Lesotho and the Sychelles.

The evolution of the Commonwealth began with the introduction of self-government in Canada in the 1840s; Australia, New Zealand and South Africa became independent from Britain before World War I. The name Commonwealth was suggested to the Imperial War Cabinet in 1917 by the South African diplomat and later prime minister, Jan Christian Smuts.

The modern Commonwealth began with the entry of independent India and Pakistan in 1947, and of Shri Lanka (then Ceylon) in 1948. The CHG then decided that allegiance to the same monarch need not be a condition of membership - though they accepted the British monarch as a symbol of the free association of the independent member nations and, as such, as the Head of the Commonwealth - and this was a precedent for a number of other members.

It is not possible here to list all the Commonwealth's achievements, but each member benefits in aid or trade

The Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC) - the operational arm

the poor in a variety of ways.

of the Commonwealth Secre tariat - is currently promoting the role of women in environmental projects. Worldwide i is also providing 350 specialists to advise on economic development, is training 5000 technicians, is active in 60 marketing projects, and is helping to establish or improve 100 industrial concerns.

Training Workshops

The CFTC finances the Food Production and Rural Development Division, which support training workshops in emergent Commonwealth countries for improving and upgrading the living standards of small farmers and landless people.

The Commonwealth Science Council concentrates or natural resources management the exploitation of mineral, biological and energy resources and providing scientific training for member countries. Last year, the Common-

wealth Development Corporation (CDC), financed by the United Kingdom's Overseas Development Administration, invested £1248 million in economic enterprises in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and the Pacific Islands. Although the CDC is committed to Commonwealthbased projects, it also provides finance for numerous ventures in non-member countries.

In a world poised as it is between the opportunity for progress and the possibility of conflict the Commonwealth parallels the United Nations in promoting political dialogue, cooperation, the well-being of humanity and world peace.

The writer is London Press

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Neutrality: contribution

Sir, Congratulation for two editorials, "Irresponsible Students" and "Honouring Dr F R Khan" published in The Daily Star on January 14. However, the following observations are

Every one speaks of neutrality, however, very by people would remember that neutrality calls for justice, love, good work and peace, etc within some principles: "Do to the other people that you would them do unto you" which is almost absent now. "Only on

the balance of the good work thou shalt be saved" which is out of practice now. A train can run smoothly on two rails only provided the wheels are equal. Freedom of the conscience, democratic and human rights of the other people to be ensured. However, none of these

principles had been touched in the first editorial. As per the editorial, two honourable ministers had gone to save the teachers and not the law of the country. Consequently, it is clear that our children, who are sent to the universities for studies, are being used by the

political parities/politicians/ leaders and so on.

Dr F R Khan and many sons of the country had carned good name and fame in the countries outside the country, however, the second editorial did not tell us what they had done for the country itself.

Andrew D' Costa Hemendra Das Road, Dhaka

Of writing

Sir, Ms Nahtasha Kamal took much trouble to write a lot with reference to my letter dt. 4.12.92 (ref: Her letter dt. 6.1.93).

in fact, the invitation for articles was made to the members of the Association of British Council Scholars (ABCS). The address for sending the articles didn't appear in the letter for one reason or another. I had, however, made the comment on the art of writing to generalize the sub-

No publishing authority, especially of newspapers, and journals or magazines can guarantee publication of any writer's work. It is the merit, credibility etc of the work which will ensure its publica-

M Zahidul Haque Editor, ABCS Journal, Dhaka

Why not in Bosnia?

Sir, The US and its coalition partners established a nofly zone to protect the Shiites and Kurdish Muslims in southern and northern Iraq. The US and its coalition partners have already hit non-military targets killing civilians in Basra. There was no prior notice, timing whatsoever for such attack. The sleeping civilians could not imagine that such attack would come upon them when no war was raging. Whereas the Serbs are killing Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina. About 20000 helpless women have

been raped. The Serbs are not listening to anybody. I don't understand why the world conscience is not focusing its full attention to the grave things? And why the United States of America is not yet using its power in Bosnia?

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury DGM. Sonali Bank, HO. Dhaka

Babri mosque — a parallel case

Sir, It was in 1913 that in spite of the vigorous protests of the local Muslims, the Cawnpore Municipality, while broadening a road, demolished a portion of a standing mosque. The callousness of the UP Government towards the religious feelings of the Muslims turned the unfortunate incident into an all-India issue. A delegation of the Indian Muslims went to England and met the representatives of the British Government. At the directive of the Government,

Viceroy Lord Hardinge took necessary steps to repair the mosque and restore it its earlier status. It is highly regrettable that in spite of the timely and earnest appeals of the Indian Muslims and saner section of its non-Muslim population, the Government of India has ignominiously failed to stop the demolition of the Babri mosque, a place of worship and a historic monument, The abject failure has not only tarnished India's reputation as a democracy but also unleashed a wide-scale persecu tion against her largest reli gious minority - the Muslims.

In the interest of justice and respect for human rights, it is upto the Government of India to adopt meaningful measures, without further delay, to "build the Babri mosque and restore communal harmony in the country

Tejgaon, Dhaka

M N Hay

see the activities of UC committees and to deal with ad ministration, management and-

development of primary education within thana jurisdiction. Recruitment and training of primary teachers and their placement to thanas can be done centrally as at present. Facilities at primary training institutes (PTIs) can be utilised for short initial training of feeder school teachers. Local Level Planning sources and other assistance. ~ School authorities and thana

Once it is decided to have hundreds of feeder schools under CPE programme, additional resources will have to be mobilized. The question of levying a token education tax to supplement the education budget may be seriously considered. In the alternative a Prime Ministers Children's Fund may be created for raising funds. There are many public spirited and wealthy people in the country who will positively respond to an appeal for donations for such a noble

to be congratulated for its courageous decision to introduce compulsory primary education all over the country, beginning 1993, and encourage opening of satellite schools and non-formal primary education in support of the programme. A community supported two-tier integrated system of primary education under decentralised administration suggested in this article seems to be the best option for Bangladesh to achieve the goal

retired Additional Secretary,